HESI Standardized Nursing Exam Exam: A Program Evaluation Project

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BACKGROUND

The UW-Eau Claire (UWEC) nursing program, like many nursing programs, utilizes standardized exams to prepare nursing students for the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). The NCLEX is a licensing exam students must pass after graduation to become a registered nurse. A variety of exam companies are available. The UWEC Nursing Program elected to use Health Education Systems Incorporated (HESI). The HESI testing program in the UWEC nursing department was modified and expanded in Spring of 2020. Several specialty exams and the exit exam are administered as students progress through the program. Remediation and retesting are required when students score under the faculty-established benchmark of 850 on specialty exams. Remediation involves completion of online HESI modules tailored to students’ exam results.

AIM

The purpose of this project was to conduct a remediation-focused evaluation of the HESI standardized exam program in the UWEC Nursing Department.

DESIGN/SAMPLE/METHODS

A cross-sectional descriptive design was used for this program evaluation study.

A Qualtrics survey was administered to current UWEC pre-licensure students and recent alumni to gather feedback on the remediation process including benefits, barriers, and facilitators. Seventy surveys were submitted by BSN students (n = 29; 41%) and alumni (n = 41; 59%) who completed HESI specialty exams between Spring 2020 and Fall 2021 (21.4% response rate). Additionally, archival aggregated, de-identified HESI specialty exam data were analyzed from Spring 2020 through Fall 2021.

- Quantitative survey and archival exam data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially.
- Qualitative data derived from open-ended survey comments were analyzed using thematic analysis.

The UWEC Institutional Review Board approved this study.

RESULTS

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Archival scores were aggregated across four HESI specialty exams: Fundamentals, Medical-Surgical, Pediatric, Gerontology

- 1st attempt (N = 907): Mean = 866.5; 54.5% attained benchmark
- 2nd attempt (n = 540): Mean = 839.1; 40.1% attained benchmark

Mean change in scores based on required remediation time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required Remediation Time</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Change (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 hours (1st attempt score &gt;850)*</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>-29.2 (143.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 hours (1st attempt score 750-849)</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>38.6 (136.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 hours (1st attempt score 650-749)</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>122.9 (158.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 hours (1st attempt score &lt;650)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>125.4 (141.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Remediation only required if student wants to retest

WAS REMEDICATION HELPFUL?

More alumni than current students reported remediation was helpful (p = .029)

More current students than alumni thought too much time is required (p = .003)

WHAT ARE BARRIERS TO COMPLETING REMEDIATION?

- Lack of time due to other course requirements 29%
- Lack of time due to work obligations 20%
- Remediation resources are not helpful 20%
- Lack of time due to personal obligations 17%
- Challenges navigating the remediation software 8%
- Forgot about the need to complete remediation 5%
- Poor internet connection 2%

WHAT REMEDIATION STRATEGIES WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL?

- NCLEX-style practice quizzes 30%
- Formal NCLEX-preparation course 19%
- Faculty-guided group review of content 17%
- Workshop on test-taking skills 10%
- Tailored self-guided online content review** 8%
- Workshop on test anxiety 4%
- Faculty-guided individual review of content 4%
- Peer mentoring/tutoring 3%
- Assigned case studies 3%
- Remediation course 3%

WHAT REMEDIATION POLICIES WOULD BE MOST MOTIVATING?

- Grade incentive for attaining the benchmark 29%
- Awarding points for remediation 19%
- Required remediation/retaking** 15%
- Required exam preparation assignments 15%
- Formal recognition for attaining benchmark 4%
- Exam scores weighted higher for grades 3%

QUALITATIVE THEMES

- It is a good way to prepare for NCLEX.
  - “Overall was extremely helpful for what I wanted to work on prior to taking the NCLEX and was a confident booster when able to score high enough.”
  - “It lets students know where they are and how much preparation they need before the NCLEX.”
- Incorporating incentives or rewards for successful remediation may help the process feel less punitive.
  - “Some good content but formatted like punishment.”
  - “I think the remediation process is helpful, but there should be less required remediation and more incentive to reach the benchmark. That way, individuals want to reach the benchmark, and they can study for the exam in the way they see fit.”
- Remediation needs to be more interactive and should include practice questions, case studies, videos, and faculty support.
  - “Just reading content is not an effective way for me to learn.”
  - “We are in great need of additional support in terms of preparing for these exams as well as the NCLEX from faculty and other resources that can help us truly build confidence, ask questions, and build our knowledge.”
  - “Practice questions or videos would have been way more helpful.”
  - “I've heard many students who had to do the long remediation discuss how they would just leave their page open and move their mouse every few minutes to reach their requirement. I don't think students want to read 6 hours of text when we already have textbook readings for class.”
- Remediation is time-consuming and adds stress to students’ busy schedules.
  - “I think that it adds un-needed stress to our already stressful homework workload.”
  - “…sometimes the amount of remediation time was way too much on top of other class work, exams, and other work/personal obligations.”
- Remediation materials need to be more relevant and directed to questions missed on the exam.
  - “Sometimes the remediation was too long or short, or seemed irrelevant to what was on the HESI exams.”
  - “I wish they went over the questions we got wrong and taught more about that specific topic.”

CONCLUSION

- Students value the HESI testing and remediation process for its customization to individual needs and preparation for NCLEX, but think it needs to be more interactive, incentivized, and faculty supported.
- Recommendations:
  - Continue to require remediation and retesting for students who do not attain the benchmark on their first attempt at a HESI specialty exam.
  - Require pre-exam preparation activities such as faculty-led sessions to review content and complete practice questions.
  - Award full credit to students who achieve the benchmark score on their first attempt at a HESI specialty exam; consider additional credit for exceeding.
  - Require students who score below 750 to meet individually with a faculty member to develop a study plan.
  - Assign relevant case studies to meet a portion of the required remediation time.
  - Incentivize remediation by awarding points for successful completion.

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